

Castlemaine Naturalist

July 2023

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**Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.**



*"Ecological Decomposers".
Artwork by Louise Saunders*

June Monthly Meeting – Guest Speaker, Louise Saunders “Botanical Art – increasing environmental awareness”

Louise Saunders is a professional botanical and wildlife artist who was born and grew up in Benalla in Victoria's North East. Her mother was an enthusiastic gardener and naturalist. Louise developed similar interests and delighted in all the wildflowers that grew on her grandparent's property, particularly the many ground orchids in the area which she fell in love with, including the rare purple donkey orchids. Louise's family were keen on a variety of arts and crafts including pottery and she also developed many interests in creative arts. This early passion for nature, particularly wildlife and plants, continued to develop and she became a keen painter. Her pictures were noticed and admired regionally and nationally and, with advice and encouragement of the well-known botanists, Mark Clements and David Lloyd Jones, she accepted a challenge to paint all the orchids of NE Victoria. This resulted in 88 (out of a possible 120) exquisite portraits of some of the region's unique and beautiful ground orchids, each painted in a background of vegetation typical of their habitat.

Louise went on to have many exhibitions of her work, starting with one in the Benalla Regional Art Gallery. She progressed on to a career as a professional botanical artist, expanding her portfolio to include subtropical native plants and native animals after relocating to SE Queensland. She enjoys painting her flora or fauna subjects in their natural habitat. She has continued to expand her artistic range to include portraits of pets and exotic animals.

Louise has travelled internationally to pursue her art through residencies and expeditions, including as an illustrator on two Earth Watch expeditions and travelled to Thailand and Borneo and has had her work published in books and magazines.

She enjoys the challenge of working with a number of media including watercolour, fine art pencils, acrylic and pastels. She was subsequently appointed as artist-in-residence at an eco-tourist resort on the Gold Coast, where further exhibitions of her works resulted in sales of her works nationally and internationally, some to well-known clients including the actor Jack Thompson and Lady Susan Renouf.

Louise also became a dedicated wildlife conservationist and rescuer, particularly involving bat rescues during the Hendra and Australian Bat Lyssavirus outbreaks. She fostered many orphaned baby bats, becoming very attached to them.

She regularly donates a percentage from sales of her paintings to wildlife and conservation causes and has donated one of her paintings to support the protests against the commercial development of the Toondah Harbour, on Redlands Coast Qld, an important koala and migratory shorebird habitat.

She was awarded a medal of the Order of Australia in 2019 for her services to wildlife conservation and visual arts. She is a member of several art societies including Queensland Wildlife Artists' Society, Botanical Art Society Australia and Artists for Conservation.

At our June meeting, Louise gave a presentation about her art and conservation work, illustrated with many examples of her beautiful artwork.

Further information can be located on [Louise's website](#).

Judith Nimmo

Samples of Louise Saunders' artwork



On the forest edge (*Antechinus sp.*)



Australian Wildflowers

Excursion to McCay Reservoir, 10 June 2023

Catherine Harboe-Ree

Twenty-six hardy souls braved the chilly weather for the opportunity to visit McCay Reservoir, which is not generally open to the public. Amongst our number were several visitors, and members attending their first excursion. Our leader was the energetic Kylie McLennan, Coliban Water's Reservoir, Rural and Catchment Coordinator.



McCay Reservoir, looking down towards the dam wall and control tower. *Photo: Noel Young*

Constructed from May 1959 to November 1960, McCay Reservoir is a holding and retention basin for the supply of water sourced from the Coliban River storages to Castlemaine, Maldon, Harcourt, Newstead, Fryerstown and Guildford. The reservoir, which has a capacity of 1,360 million litres, sits in a very small catchment of 180 hectares comprising predominantly heathy dry forest. The reservoir was originally called Castlemaine Reservoir, but was renamed in honour of H.W. McCay, a deputy commissioner of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.



Kylie showing maps of the reservoir.

Photo: Lou Citroën

The highlight of the excursion was the old Poverty Gully Tunnel, constructed in the 19th century and still an essential part of the water supply for this district. The tunnel is 756 metres long, about 1.2 metres wide and 1.5 metres high. It supplies water from the Coliban Main Channel to McCay Reservoir. Another highlight was watching Kylie doing push-ups from time to time as part of a charity drive to raise funds for mental health (Push for Better Foundation)!



Participants in the excursion standing beside the tunnel and channel. *Photo: Liz Albert*



Poverty Gully Tunnel. *Photo Lou Citroën*

No doubt due to the time of year, there were not many birds or invertebrates, but we did see several colonies of whirligig beetles in the channel adjacent to the tunnel entrance and a good number of fungi species. At the end of our tour, Kylie took us up a ridge to show us a particularly rich area of grassy woodland, with Red-anther Wallaby Grass and many native herbs and shrubs.

Why is *Discaria pubescens*, the Hairy Anchor-plant, so rare?

David Cheal

Discaria pubescens, the Hairy Anchor-plant or Australian Anchor-plant, is a notable local rarity. It is listed as 'Critically Endangered' under the Victorian legislation (the Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, the FFG) and is considered 'Near Threatened' in Queensland and 'Endangered' in Tasmania. The text in the Flora of Victoria online mentions it as "Now extremely rare west of Melbourne (Ballarat district only) and possibly extinct in the north-east (formerly known from Mansfield, Wodonga and Mitta Mitta areas), scattered and uncommon in the east (Snowy Range, Benambra district, Wulgulmerang, Cobberas area, Bendock), usually associated with basaltic substrate near streams, in cool, elevated areas". Despite all this, it has a few records from our local area, mostly near the Campaspe River (which passes thru basalt country from Kyneton towards Lake Eppalock).



1. Hairy Anchor-plant *Discaria pubescens*. Photo: David Cheal

D. pubescens is a bit of weirdo. It's in the family Rhamnaceae that includes all the *Pomaderris* species but looks so very different, being a mass of rather pungent (vicious even) spines & substantially leafless. The Action Statement No. 47 (under the FFG) refers to its occurrence 'in steam and river valleys in western Victoria', although it also mentions that a few occurrences are 'some distance from drainage lines and streams'.

I became familiar with it during targeted surveys throughout the Victorian Alps and noted that it was always heavily browsed (see photo 1, from MacFarlanes Flat in the far east of the Alpine National Park, above Suggan Buggan). Nevertheless, it was not notably associated with streams in the Alps. For many observers, its remnant occurrences along streams suggested that it required the extended soil moisture in such situations and this was its prime habitat. However, there is more to streamside habitats than purely extra soil moisture. Its precise habitat in lowland sites is not just beside streams, but amongst the basalt boulders and rocks that often characterize streams thru basalt country. A useful experiment suggested itself, utilizing the basalt scarps and outcrops of my property at Redesdale.



2. Mature *Discaria pubescens*
Photo: David Cheal

Tubestock of *D. pubescens* was obtained and planted amongst the outcropping basalt rocks high on an escarpment (nowhere near a

stream, which is 30m alt. below). Most soon disappeared, but in the meantime an exclusion fence was erected over the outcropping scarp and the remaining *D. pubescens* plants were protected with 90 cm wire mesh guards. In subsequent years these few *D. pubescens* grew very well and the largest is now 1.5m tall and has bloomed (photo 2). There are no wallabies, rabbits, hares nor wombats inside the exclusion fence. Regrettably, a wallaby (Black Wallaby, *Wallabia bicolor*) got inside when the gate was left open recently and the next day all the *Discaria* had been nibbled. Further recent plantings of *Discaria* seem to be establishing well.



Discaria pubescens – showing detail of the spines. Photo: David Cheal

The conclusion from this account is that the greatest threat to *D. pubescens* is its (unexpected) high palatability. Reducing or removing browsing mammals should be the highest priority for all extant stands and newly-established stands. Its restriction to riparian sites in our region is likely not due to any moisture requirement, so much as resulting from the browsing protection that growing amongst rocks can offer. In particular and in our region, Black Wallabies (*W. bicolor*) are the major threat and rabbits are suspected to be a notable threat too. In the Alps, horses and deer are suspected to be the major threats.

Observations

***Pterostylis striata* (Striated Greenhood) – Russell Stanley**

Russell came across some nice clusters of *Pterostylis striata* at Maldon a couple of days ago. He mentions it only because it is a species absent from Ern Perkins' Castlemaine Orchids webpage. It was growing close to the dam on Smiths Reef Track.



Pterostylis striata, the Striated Greenhood.
Photos: Russell Stanley

Australian Shield Shrimps – Peter Turner

While on a recent trip to Simpson Desert we sighted these small orange crustaceans moving in muddy water - Shield Shrimps, *Triops australiensis*. In his recent book on Australian deserts Steve Morton summarises the lifecycle of these 'living fossils':

The gibber plain has been baking dry for a couple of years when storms finally gather and dump 40 mm across glistening stones and scattered saltbush. Water gathers in ... clay pans, a few cm deep. Within a couple of days, the cloudy red water is churning with shield shrimps gathered in squirming masses to feed on algae and organic matter.



Triops australiensis, Shield Shrimp. Photos: Peter Turner

Most earlier references specify two species of shield shrimp (also called tadpole shrimp) in Australia, *T. australiensis* and *Lepidurus apus*. Atlas of Living Australia distribution maps show *Triops* occurs primarily in the dry inland and *Lepidurus* in more southerly regions: Euan Moore has photos of *Lepidurus apus* from wetlands in SW Victoria. *Triops* have two compound eyes and a third simple eye that emerges during early stages of the animal's development. The large shield-shaped carapace covers the head and thorax with many legs (see photos). Reproduction is both sexual and by self-fertilisation of females. Eggs are laid near the edges of the water body and can remain dormant for many years if there is no rain. The fossil record reveals that the species has hardly changed for 250 million years....*And here they are still, hatching from desiccation-resistant eggs the instant the dust is flooded, completing their life cycle in just a few weeks of furious activity* [Morton, p204].

Ref: Steve Morton (2022) Australian Deserts – Ecology and Landscape. CSIRO Publishing

In addition the group visited the Mac Clark Conservation Reserve SE of Alice Springs. This healthy woodland reserve is one of three areas in Australia where the unusual *Acacia peuce* tree is found.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acacia_peuce



Acacia peuce tree showing white seed pods. Photo: Peter Turner

“It was a beaut lookin’ fella, that fancy rosella”- Kerrie Jennings

Both grandchildren eyed the pot plant and Grannie’s new ceramic bird. Hugh (4yo) said it’s a ‘Rosella’, Evie (6yo) said no, it’s a ‘Parrot’. With a full-blown barney erupting over the ID of Grannie’s new bird, an exasperated Hugh left the room shortly to return with his version of a field guide, (‘There was an old lady who swallowed a mozzie’), triumphantly slapped it open on the table, “Seeee, Evie! It’s a Ro-sel-laaa!! Granny had to get out Pizzey & Knight to explain ...



Left:

Hugh's reference manual!

Duelling Raptors – Ash Vigus

Keen local birder and photographer, Ash Vigus, sent these great photos of a Peregrine Falcon fending off a Brown Falcon trying to grasp the Peregrine's kill. They were seen near Muckleford Station. The Peregrine only had one eye but won the duel.



No you don't!

The Brown Falcon concedes.

Photo: Ash Vigus



The Victor – Peregrine Falcon

Photo: Ash Vigus

More Observations



Starfish fungus *Aseroe rubra*
Photo: Sue Oldfield



Chelepteryx collesi Batwing Moth, Bega.
Wingspan approx. 150mm.
Photo: Euan Moore



Rosy Heath-myrtle, *Euomyrtus ramosissima*. Sighted along the Loop Tk.
Photo: Peter Turner.



Pterostylis melagramma
Sue Teltscher spotted this Tall
Greenhood on the edge of the
Goldfields Tk.
Photo: Peter Turner



Beach Stone-curlew on a beach near
the mouth of Boggy Ck, Merimbula.
Well south of its normal range.
Photo: Euan Moore

Birds of Sutton Grange – June 2023

Hazel Hartland

Amethyst Merganser	Grey Cormorant	Shrike
Amethyst Swan	Grey Heron	Spotted Green Warbler
Barnard's Warbler	Laughing Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Black-winged Stilt	Long-billed Curlew	White-winged Blackbird
Common Moorhen	Pink Cormorant	Yellow-bellied Honeyeater
Coot	Pink Avocet	

From the Committee

Our club has a keen interest in the local environment and wants to help ensure that our local nature here and there is protected from threats to its long term survival. From time to time there are opportunities for the Club to contribute and make submissions to all levels of governmental processes as part of requests and necessary consultation procedures.

We have recently added a new "Submissions" page to our website under the "About Us" tab where you can see our recent submissions online.

April 2023

Submission to Mr Alexander Shier, Council on the Council's 2023-24 Draft Budget asking for more funding for weed control.

Submission to Mr Alexander Shier, Council on the draft Mount Alexander Shier Council Climate Change Strategy. Also posted is the response to our submission from Council.

May 2023

Submission to the Victorian Parliament Inquiry into Victoria's Occupational Health and Safety Arrangements.

SEANA Spring Camp - Yarram, October 20-21, 2023, hosted by the Sale & District FNC and Latrobe Valley FNC

The South East Australian Naturalists' Association (SEANA) organises two camps each year where local Naturalist groups from around SE Australia gather to meet fellow naturalists and explore a new region under the guidance of local experts. Several of our members greatly enjoyed the Autumn Camp at Port Campbell. The SEANA Spring Camp will be held in Yarram where local FNC hosts will be glad to guide you an exploration of the highly diverse region which includes the Tarralgon National Park, a number of state forests with such flora, Humealonga Mallee and Coastal Park, Crown Island and the southern end of Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Please click on the following links for the [general details](#) with an overview of the camp activities, [accommodation options](#) and the [registration form](#) (due Friday 6th August). Early accommodation booking is recommended. It requires camp manager Phil Raymond.

Coming Events

Monthly Meeting: Friday 14th July, 7.30pm by Zoom.

Speaker: Dr Matt West (University of Melbourne Biosciences) “Protecting frogs from Chytrid fungus”.

See Back Page for details on how to join the Zoom meeting.

Matt will talk about his research studies into the Chytrid fungus that is causing a serious decline in our frog populations. Matt is identifying factors that influence frog disease susceptibility and strategies for protecting frogs from this fungus. He will also describe projects to translocate healthy populations of frogs, including the Growling Grass Frog, to boost populations at other sites where they were once more common.

Excursion: Sat 15th July, 1.30pm. “Maldon Historic Reserve Flora Surveys”

Leaders: Euan Moore and Richard Piesse.

Our July excursion will be to the Gower area of the Maldon Historic Reserve. The purpose of the visit will be to look at some of the vegetation plots established by Ern Perkins around 2009 to monitor the effects of bush fires and fuel reduction burns on the native vegetation. We will remeasure one or possibly two of these quadrats and demonstrate the methodology used. We will also make a quick visit to another set of quadrats that have been subject to intense fire so that we can see the differences in impact between no fire, light fire and intense fire. The bush is starting to show the effects of winter rain and approaching spring. Some plants are already starting to flower and many herbs, including orchids, are starting to shoot. The wetter conditions also mean that there is an abundance of fungi. There will be a chance to explore the area to record and photograph those plants that are already flowering.

Meet: for 1.30pm departure from the Octopus car park (Duke St, opposite the Castle Motel) or 1.45pm at Smiths Reef dam.

Bring: water, afternoon tea, sturdy shoes and if necessary, wet weather gear.

Boot hygiene: due to concern about spreading plant pathogens in our soils, please clean your boots thoroughly before leaving home (scrub off dirt and remove seeds). On arrival at the excursion site, we will spray the soles of our boots with Phytoclean. Again, we will brush dirt etc. off our boots before leaving.

The Field Trip will be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.



This quadrat had a patchy burn in 2009. How does it look now? *Photo: Ern Perkins*

Advance Notice - September Excursions:

Special Double Booking near Ballarat, Saturday 8th - Sunday 9th September

Following our usual monthly meeting on Friday 8th September at the Living Church Hall, for our September excursion we will visit two sites near Ballarat on for Saturday and Sunday.

- **Saturday 8th** - visit of Special a pre-dedicated wildlife sanctuary offerings (Pillars 10th Ballarat) for a lot of the sanctuary. Then an early start for before commencing two contemporary natural events (Richard Williams, Harbourside etc) until about 5pm.
- **Sunday 9th** - visit of 5 sites for an excellent walk in Chesham Road Sanctuary (2000 Linton Pigeonhole Rd, near Linton) with Emily White, Secretary Ballarat F&C. As we search for beautiful natural events we will require the wonderful array of springside facilities at the sanctuary.

Because we need to know the number attending prior to this event we ask that participants please register by filling in those on concorporate@btinternet.com if they are planning to attend these activities. Please provide your name, number attending, contact phone, where you will be staying, and indicate whether you will be attending on both days, Saturday only or Sunday only. We will send details of meeting places and additional information directly to those who have registered.

Accommodation Saturday 8th September - Participants must make their own accommodation bookings for Saturday night. Attractions can either camp (suitable for caravans) at the Chesham Road Sanctuary (bookings required as follows) or stay in nearby accommodation.

- **Camping at Chesham Road Sanctuary** (about 10km down from Ballarat) - **Available** tents and shower, equipped sites but power points available for charging phones etc. Drinking water and hot water (Please book directly with the sanctuary coordinator \$10 per adult + \$5 per night. Payment via EFT - Account Name: Ballara Australia Operations Account, BSB: 083300 A/C No: 11 000 0001, Ref: Chesham Road + your name. Enquiries, Email: 0433 344 207).
- **Alternative accommodation suggestions:** There are country hotels offering accommodation at Linton, Traralgon and Shire Valley. Alternatively there are a number of motels and hotels in the south western suburbs of Ballarat. Most of these options will be rather expensive based on our low activity rates.

Disclaimer: The options suggested in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

PROGRAM

Monthly meetings are held at the club via Zoom during the winter months (June - August) commencing at 7.30pm. If you registered for the June meeting, you will be sent the link for registering with Zoom for the July meeting.

Otherwise, please email Peter Turner to register and receive the link for joining the Zoom meeting.

Members and visitors are invited to share their interesting observations, at the meeting. Please email any photos to distribute your report as PDF or MP3 to Peter Moore by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite the Castle Hotel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise.

See "Country Events" page for more details about July events.

For July 14, Meeting 7.30pm (on Zoom). Speaker: Dr Matt Peat (University of Melbourne, Biodiversity) "Predicting Ings from Climate Ings".

For July 15, Excursion 1.30pm, Leader: David Moore & Richard Preece, "Town area, Market Village, Market Farm country".

For August 11, Meeting 7.30pm (on Zoom). Speakers: Tracy Lohr & Peter Jackson (Oxford Zoology) "The role of detection Ings in conservation".

For August 12, Excursion 11.30am at the request of 7.30pm at Shepherds Place ground, Whipstock, Leader: Peter Turner & Peter Young, "Whipstock wetlands walk".

For September 8, Meeting 7.30pm (online @Hushy Hall). Combined meeting with Baffle Creekland. Speaker: Peter Moore "Birding in SA/around country".

MEETINGS ARE HELD ONLINE AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

Castlemaine Newsletter: - email newsletter material to: newsletter.club@gmail.com

* Deadline for the August edition: **18th July**

Club website (<http://www.castlemaineclubnaturalists.org.au>)

Subscriptions: (Membership forms and payment details on CMC website)

Ordinary membership: Single £25, Family £50

Preserves or student: Single £15, Family £30

Subscription includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

Committee

President:	Peter Turner
Vice President:	Joan Moore
Secretary:	Angie Wilson
Treasurer:	David Smith
Immediate Past:	Paul Young, Andy Ford, JF Higgins
Committee:	George Woodward, Colin & Helen Lee, Julie Harris, Jill Higgins

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 506, Castlemaine, 3556.

See ADMINISTRATION